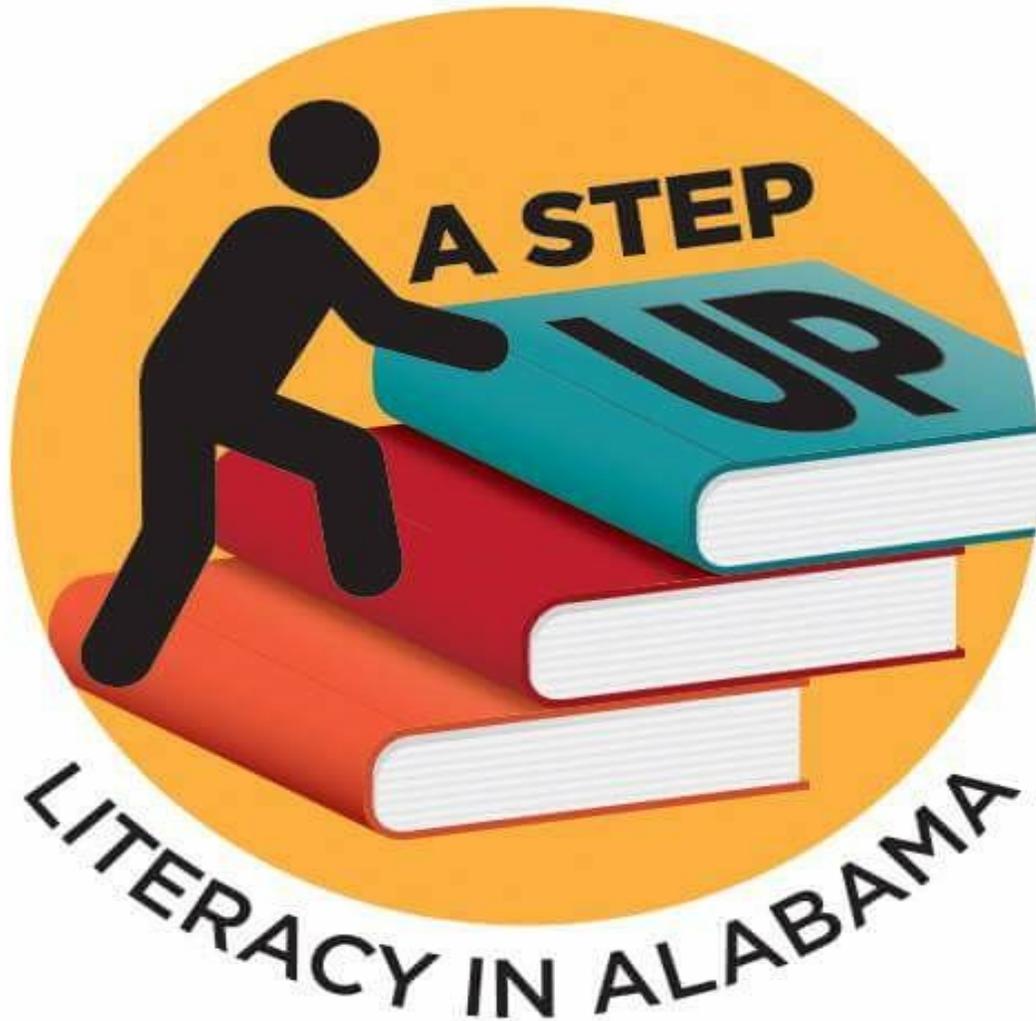


LITERACY IN ALABAMA: A STEP UP



Certified Public Manager® Program
2016 CPM Solutions Alabama



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Literacy in Alabama Project Team	3
Acknowledgments	4
Introduction	5
Team Challenge	6
Literacy Statistics	7
The Effects of Illiteracy	13
Common Challenges	15
Existing Resources in Alabama	15
Recommendations	24
<i>Alabama Task Force on Adult Literacy</i>	27
<i>Literacy Awareness Campaign</i>	28
<i>Incentive Programs</i>	29
Conclusion	30
Bibliography	31

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INTRODUCTION

Across the globe, illiteracy is on the hearts and minds of people that it most greatly affects and it is a burden that is shared by all, even those who are literate. Illiteracy touches each and every one of us in its own unique way. To be one of the most successful, powerful and technologically advanced nations, we suffer greatly in the fight against illiteracy. Every state in this nation is actively involved in efforts to deal with illiteracy. The citizens of Alabama are a part of this battle. Like all other states in this nation, Alabama has made accomplishments in the battle against illiteracy, many of which we will discuss in this white paper. The purpose of this white paper is to bring light to the topic of illiteracy in Alabama and make recommendations that could potentially reduce the number of individuals affected by illiteracy in Alabama.

Americans today, as a whole, are more educated and more literate than any who preceded them. However, many employers say they are unable to find workers with the reading, writing, mathematical, and other basic competencies that are required in the workplace. Critics generally focused on the educational system and insisted that school reforms were necessary if the nation were to escape serious social and economic consequences. Today, however, many of those who need to improve their literacy skills have already left school. Clearly, then, the schools alone cannot strengthen the abilities of present and future employees, and of the population as a whole. A broad-based response seems necessary. (Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, & Kolstad, 2002)

The focus of this paper will be on adult functional literacy. There are many ways to define the types of literacy. Functional illiteracy is imprecisely defined, with different criteria from nation to nation, and study to study. A useful distinction can be made between pure illiteracy and functional illiteracy. Purely illiterate persons cannot read or write in any capacity, for all practical purposes. In contrast, functionally illiterate persons can read and possibly write

simple sentences with limited vocabulary, but cannot read or write well enough to deal with the everyday requirements of life in their own society. (Fuchs-Bruninghoff, Kreft, & Kropp, 2016)

The demand for literacy services is increasing and investments in literacy have a very high rate of return. ProLiteracy America reports that many literacy services have a waiting list and in some cases the return for every dollar invested has a pay back of over seven dollars. (U.S. Programs Division of ProLiteracy Worldwide, 2003). The negative effects of illiteracy are very costly to Alabama. Further investment in our future literacy efforts is a sound investment.

TEAM CHALLENGE

The Certified Public Manager® Training Program has tasked the “Team Literacy-A Step Up” members with addressing “Literacy in Alabama.” The challenge was stated as follows:

Illiteracy remains a problem in Alabama. The National Center for Educational Statistics reports that 15% of Alabamians are functionally illiterate... Functional literacy includes basic skills such as reading, writing, technological capabilities, and mathematical computation. Low literacy levels contribute toward increased high school dropout rates; higher rates of social problems such as crimes, teen pregnancy, poverty, and substance abuse; higher medical cost, including mental health cost; and a lower performing workforce.

The ability to read and perform basic calculations affects daily living activities such as determining how much medication to take, preparing meals, operating equipment and appliances, navigating highways and roads, traveling and performing duties on the job.

In what areas of the state is illiteracy occurring? In what areas of the state are colleges reporting high remediation rates? How does Alabama compare to other states in these areas? What strategies and interventions should be considered to reduce the number of individuals affected by illiteracy?

Our team efforts began with a review of available literacy statistical data. The National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) is one of the few resources available that reports national level data as well as state level data. Utilizing the NAAL data, our team was able to locate where illiteracy was occurring in Alabama and compare Alabama to other states in the country.

After a review of statistical data, our research focused on existing literacy efforts in Alabama and throughout the country. Our intent was to identify strategies, methods and programs that could benefit Alabama. Our findings led us to the conclusion that each state has its own unique circumstances surrounding adult literacy and their methods and strategies were mostly oriented around their specific needs. The State of Kentucky was identified early on as being comparable to Alabama; therefore, the lessons learned and strategies utilized could potentially be useful to Alabama.

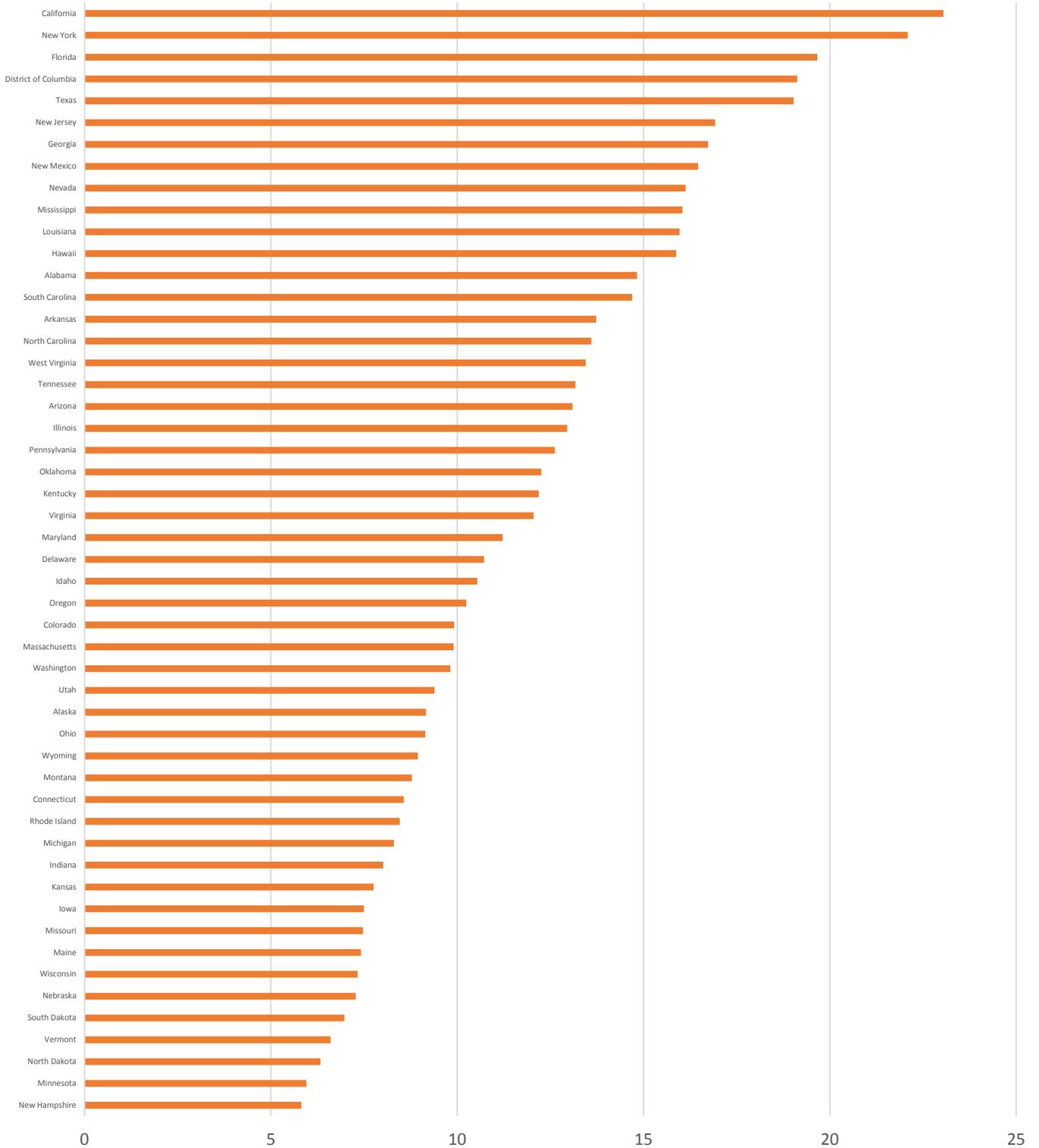
Through researching and identifying strategic methods and techniques of successful literacy programs, the members of this team gained excitement and began to call themselves Team Literacy-A Step Up with a mission to offer solutions to implement or enhance programs designed to reduce the number of people affected by illiteracy in the State of Alabama.

LITERACY STATISTICS

According to the NAAL data, Alabama is near the national average in adult prose literacy rankings. This statistical data is based on 2003 census data and is the most current national level

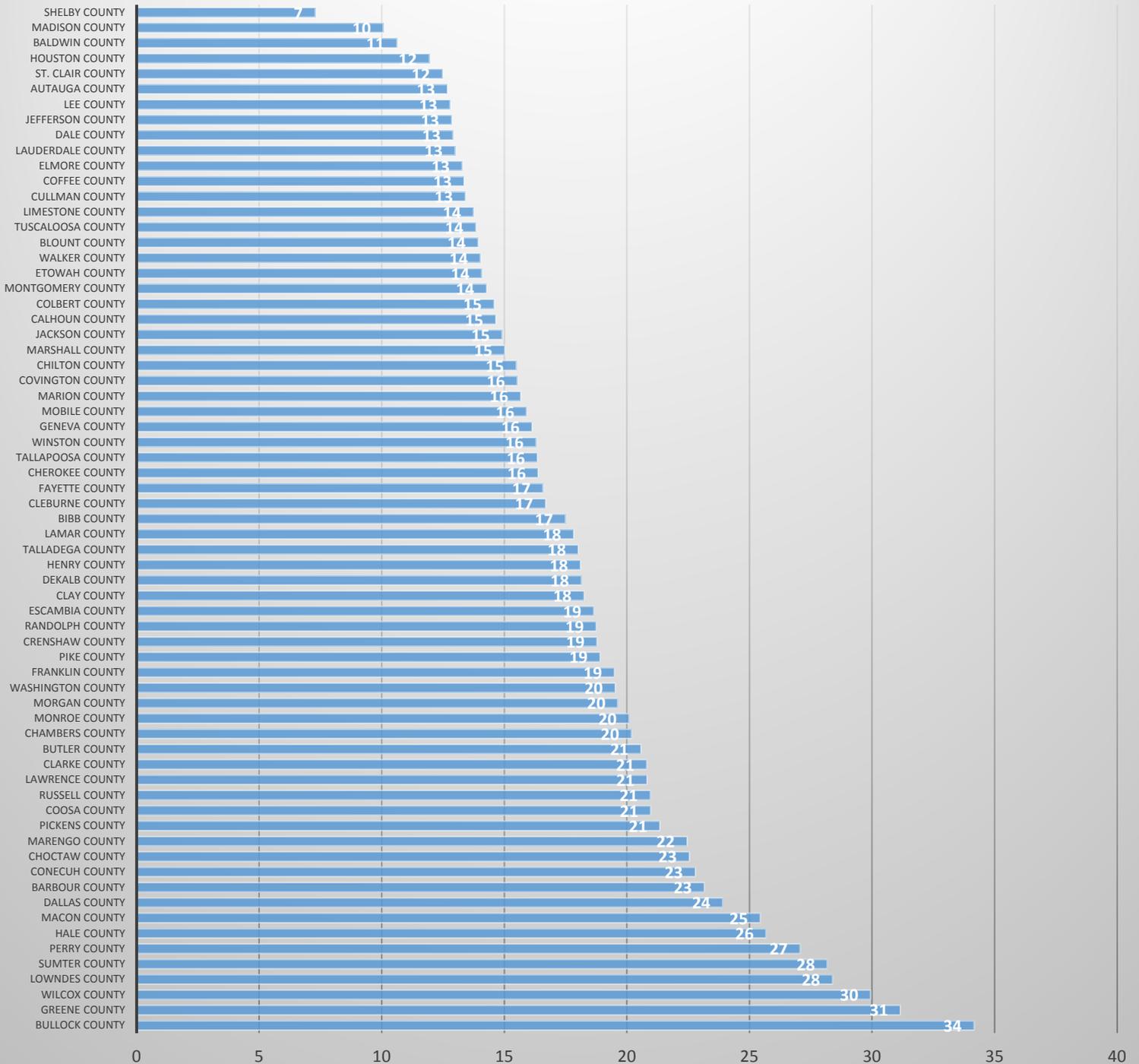
data available. Based on the population of Alabama in 2003, we can conclude that there are approximately 500,000 illiterate adults in Alabama.

Percent Lacking Basic Prose Literacy Skills Across The U.S.

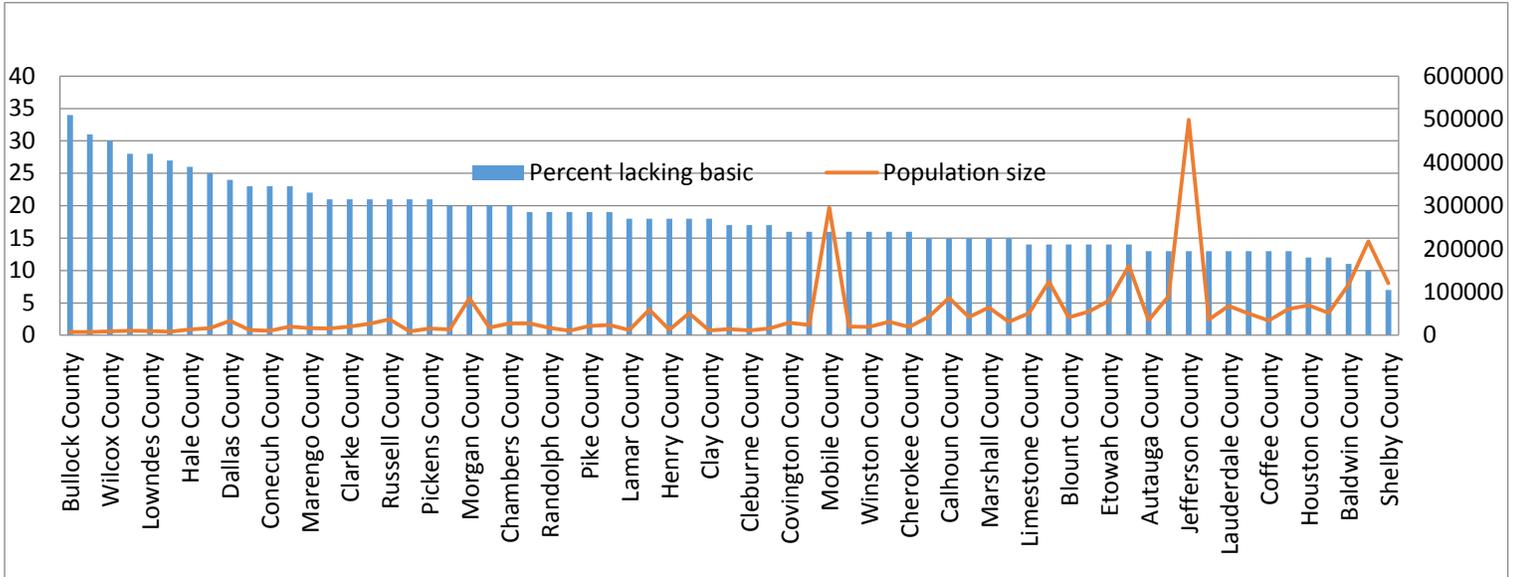


The following data charts below provide an overview of where literacy occurring in Alabama
 (National Assessment of Adult Literacy State & County Estimates of Low Literacy, 2003):

Percent Lacking Basic Prose Literacy Skills in Alabama



Alabama County Literacy Rates Compared to Population



Fifteen percent of Alabamians are lacking in prose literacy skills.

- Alabama is among eight other states that have similar rankings in prose literacy skills (South Carolina, Hawaii, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, Georgia, New Jersey)
- Thirty-seven other states in the nation have a better prose literacy skill ranking than Alabama.
- Twenty-four other states in the nation have a prose literacy skill ranking of ten percent or less.

Based on this statistical information the subsequent points can be made regarding adult illiteracy in Alabama:

- Shelby County has the lowest prose literacy skills ranking in Alabama.
- Twenty-four counties in Alabama are at the national average or lower.
- Forty-three counties in Alabama are above the national average.

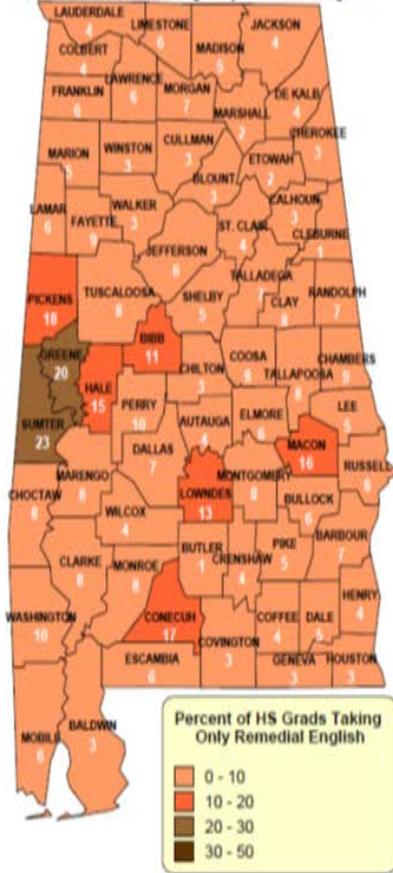
- Eight counties are nearly double the national average.

In addition to examining actual adult illiteracy rates, we were tasked with comparing remediation rates reported by colleges in the State of Alabama. The Alabama Commission on Higher Education proved to be a wonderful data resource. The following chart represents the remediation rates for students that graduated from high school and required remedial classes in Math, English or both (Alabama Commission on Higher Education, 2015).

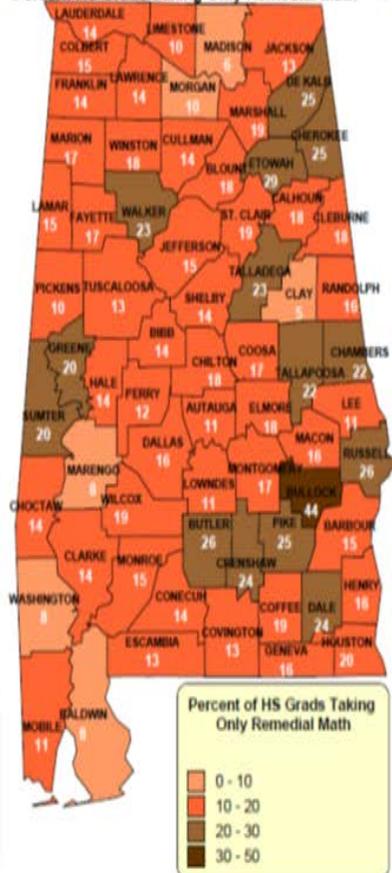
The maps reflect the most current remediation rates available from the Alabama Commission on Higher Education. When compared to the illiteracy rates by county, no clear pattern emerges. Some counties that have above average illiteracy rates do have higher levels of remediation rates, but the opposite is also represented. The chart below cross references the county illiteracy rates and remediation rates. It is important to keep in mind that the illiteracy rates are based on 2003 data, which is the most recent data available as well.

Summary of 2014-2015 Alabama Public High School Graduates Who Enrolled in Alabama Public Institutions Fall 2015 (24,063 Students)

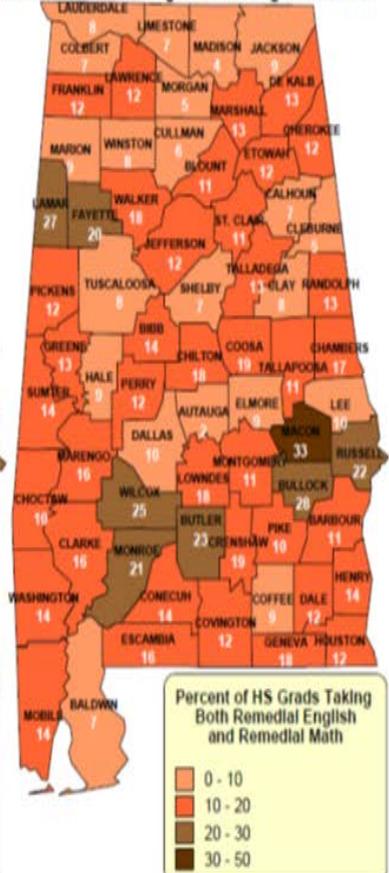
Percent HS Grads Taking Only Remedial English



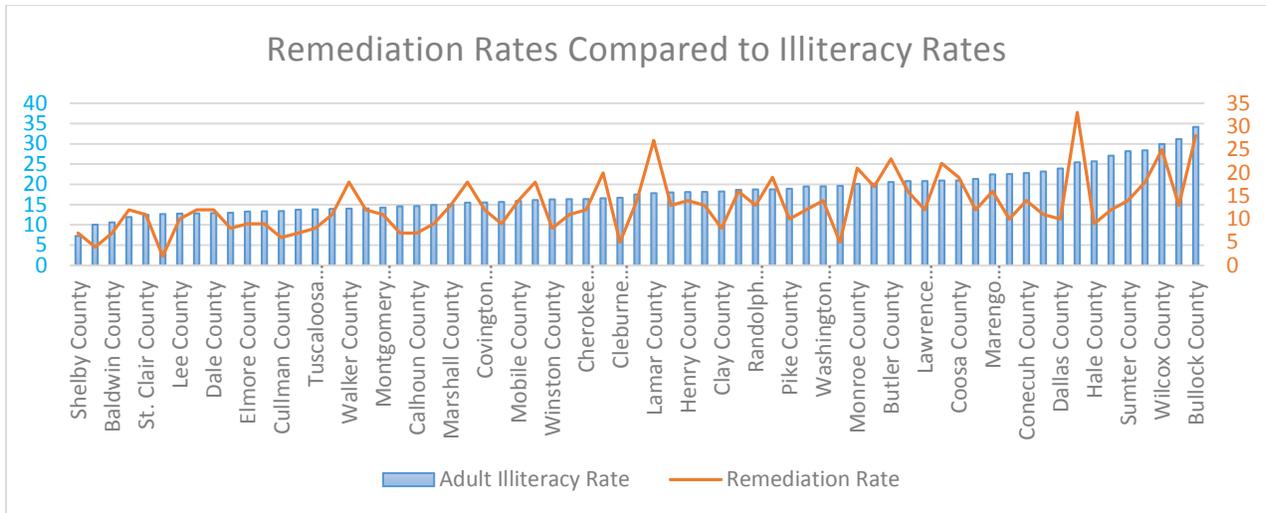
Percent HS Grads Taking Only Remedial Math



Percent HS Grads Taking Remedial English and Math



Source: Alabama Statewide Student Database; Percentages are based on the number of HS Graduates who attended a HS in that county in 2014-2015.



THE EFFECTS OF ILLITERACY

Illiteracy affects each and every citizen directly or indirectly. Experts in the field of literacy know that there is a direct relationship between the educational levels of a child’s parents. There are many factors, but the most significant is the educational level of the primary care giver or parent. Children who have parents who have not completed a high school education are five times more likely to become a high school dropout. (Darling, 1999). Raising the literacy level of adults lowers the illiteracy level of a state in two dimensions, healthcare and public assistance.

Higher rates of health problems have been linked to adult illiteracy. There is a vast amount of public information available today that helps people take better care of their health, take preventative health measures and seek treatment. Illiterate adults cannot read this information. For these reasons, adults with a limited education are more prone to cancer incidences and mortality. (Freeman, 1991)

Illiteracy rates are also linked to public assistance. The improvement of illiteracy rates can be a part of the solution for reducing the number of welfare recipients. Research on the topic

reveals that high school drop outs are likely to become dependent on welfare. Fifty percent of adults on welfare do not have a high school diploma. There is a correlation between the literacy level of adults and the length of time they are on welfare. Compared to adults who have strong literacy skills, less than five percent live in poverty, and less than one percent receives food stamps. (Legislative Research Commission, 2000)

In 1996, Governor Fob James signed Executive Order 15, creating the State Literacy Workforce Development Council. This council was tasked with addressing the impact of illiteracy in Alabama. A synopsis of the results reveals an unsettling and daunting reality. (Horne, 1997)

A survey of the State Literacy Workforce Development Council studied the impact of illiteracy on Alabama's workforce and economy using census data. Findings indicated that 55 percent of Alabama's adults functioned at literacy levels inadequate to meet the demands of a modern, technical society. Costs to business and industry were lost productivity, high employee turnover skills among workers. Other findings were as follows: the contribution of illiteracy to poverty, the effects of which cost the taxpayers at least \$495 million per year in Aid to Families with Dependent Children and food stamp costs and the link between illiteracy and crime, with the support of over and the link between illiteracy and crime, with the support of over 20,000 prisoners costing over \$200 million per year—rising by 1,000 prisoners each year. The literacy level of Alabama's workers affected the state's ability to retain existing business and industry and attract new business and industry. Social costs associated with low worker literacy included some social conditions associated with poverty such as the following: low birth weight babies, high infant mortality, child death, high teen violent death rates, large numbers of high school dropouts, high rates of teen pregnancy, and crime. The survey group identified the following

needs that, if met, would have a positive and significant impact on the state's economy and future: a high school credential; basic literacy and computational skills; and effective work attitudes.

COMMON CHALLENGES

Many common challenges face all states in the arena of adult literacy. As mentioned earlier, each state and each county within the state has its own unique needs. The same can be said about the availability of resources. The following list identifies some common challenges faced:

- Motivating low skilled, under educated adults to seek further education
- Deep seated social, economic, and cultural barriers that undervalue education
- Lack of jobs in a particular area
- Persuade the target population that education will pay off
- Inability or unwillingness to move location of residence
- Transportation barriers
- Child care barriers

EXISTING RESOURCES IN ALABAMA

There are several current programs and resources available for assisting with the needs and challenges of illiteracy. Alabama has both governmental agencies and private organizations that offer programs that address literacy. Literacy efforts are supported and maintained by literacy councils, public libraries, education foundations, community colleges, outreach programs and private organizations within the state.

Alabama State Department of Education

The Alabama State Department of Education plays an extremely important role in the literacy efforts for the State of Alabama. In 2011, the new action plan for literacy was announced, “Alabama’s Action Plan for Literacy: Birth Thru Grade 12.” Former Superintendent of Education Joseph Morton said the new plan gives Alabama the opportunity to combine available resources and utilize a cohesive and systematic framework to ensure children obtain the necessary literacy skills. (Alabama Board of Education, 2011)

The Alabama State Department of Education is charged with the responsibility of being the general policy body for public education. *Code of Alabama §16-34-1* charges the Department of Education with the responsibility of removing illiteracy in Alabama and the provision of Adult Educational Services to the target population most in need. The Alabama Adult Education and Family Literacy Plan operates within the guidelines of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and provides funding for educational services for adults and allows eligible providers to address the needs of adults such as childcare and transportation. Through this, The Alabama Community College System can offer educational opportunities to adults at no cost. (U.S. Secretary of Education, 2015)

Alabama Reading Initiative Program

The Alabama Reading Initiative Program was created in 1998 as a part of the Alabama Department of Education to focus on improving literacy skills within the state between grades K-12. The mission of the Alabama Department of Education is to provide standards, resources, and local support that education agencies need to ensure that all students graduate college and/or are career ready. The Alabama Reading Initiative Program focuses efforts on the development of literacy skills in all students. Progress has been made from 2003 to 2011 by placing a state-

funded reading coach in every elementary school. Alabama met the national average in reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress in 4th grade for the first time with the help of the program. Since 2011, the number of Alabama students reading below grade level has been reduced by half. (Alabama State Department of Education, 2014)

The Alabama Reading Initiative Program has been widely recognized and other states are now looking at Alabama for leadership and guidance in their literacy initiatives. The program provides many resources including assisting with professional development and providing literacy coaches to those in need. The program focuses on three main aspects of teaching people to read. The aspects are: preventing reading difficulties, identifying struggling readers and intervening to help grow proficient readers and expand the reading power of all students. The Alabama Reading Initiative Program practices strategic teaching, which is the process of including connected strategies, student engagement, gradual release of responsibility and formative assessment together to maximize student understanding and retention of reviewed material. Strategic teaching is effective because it takes into account all variables that affect learning. The process of learning is the Conceptual Framework which is also the foundation for learning. The Conceptual Framework identifies the processes that are essential for learners at every age. (Alabama Reading Initiative, 2014)

Literacy Council of Central Alabama

The Literacy Council of Central Alabama is located in Birmingham. It serves Blount, Jefferson, St. Clair, Shelby and Walker counties. The Council's main focus is on developing, strengthening, and supporting basic literacy and English speaking abilities in the counties it serves (alliteracycouncil.wordpress.com) (The Literacy Council of Central Alabama, n.d.). The Council was formed in 1991 when the United Way of Central Alabama, The Birmingham

Chamber of Commerce and the Junior League of Birmingham identified a need to support those battling adult illiteracy in Central Alabama. The Council's vision for each person was to achieve their maximum literacy potential. The Council reports that there are more than 92,000 illiterate adults in Central Alabama. The Council has a board of directors, board of leadership and a junior board of professionals under the age of 40 who work to raise awareness and funding to support adult literacy.

Members of the Council shared that there is new legislation currently being enacted that requires all first graders to be screened for any learning disabilities. It is the opinion of the council members that programs involving one-on-one learning and small groups are more successful methods of assisting those in need of help. The council does not currently have any new programs in development. Council staff provides one-on-one and group learning with trained volunteers and also offers on-site computer labs. They also work with the University of Alabama Birmingham who offers their employees leave time while seeking GED or Literacy classes.

The Council also allows parents to bring their children with them to the center if needed. They are independent of other literacy councils or programs. Success of the programs varies depending on the goals for the individual. Help is needed to bring awareness to the issues of illiteracy and the need for more volunteers. During our interview with members of the Council, they raised several points of interest, such as the opinion that more businesses should allow employees leave time to participate in literacy classes as well allow leave time for employees who wish to volunteer to provide reading or other types of literacy services. They also advised that the three biggest reasons people want to learn to read are to get a job, to be able to read to their children and, to be able to read the Bible. They have observed that pride keeps some people

from seeking literacy help. It takes 150 instructional hours for a person to advance one grade level, which involves a complete commitment from the individual and the volunteer to succeed.

Capital Area Adult Literacy Council

The Capital Area Adult Literacy Council is located in Montgomery, AL. The council has been around for 24 years and works with the community and with The Alabama Department of Corrections to provide workshops to train tutors on how to get literacy programs started. The founders of the Council started their tutoring program after seeing an ad in Montgomery that said “If you can read this, you can change your life.” They are funded through grants and appeals and their focus is on adult literacy. It is their observation that “Adult literacy is not as appealing as babies needing help or other crisis issues. Illiteracy is not as widely known. You can’t advertise to illiterate people.” (Capital Area Adult Literacy Council) (Corrcia, 2016) One major question the council proposed is how do the people find out about the services available for combatting illiteracy?

The Council uses a method called the Laubach Method where they instruct volunteers on how to teach. Their program is supported as a no fail program. They have one tutor assigned per student. The tutors attend workshops and participate in exercises to learn the method. There are no requirements for a volunteer, other than a passion for helping others to learn to read. The program is for adults 18 years and older. They cater to those with no skills and are able to teach them how to sound out letters and words. Students read out loud to see how well they are responding to the program, and are tested to monitor their progression in the program.

Funding for this tutoring program has decreased which presents a problem with providing learning materials for the students. Another issue that also affects the literacy rates is

unemployment and transportation for those needing help. Many of the people seeking help come in after hearing about the program through the community. Additionally, the Council sends out public service announcements to promote the program. According to the Council, they have determined that there are 65,000 people who need help in Alabama.

West Alabama Literacy Council

The West Alabama Literacy Council is located in Tuscaloosa. The Council was founded in 2008, and is funded by corporate and community grants and foundational area grants. The Council is focused on nine counties included in the Black Belt Region (Lamar, Fayette, Bibb, Greene, Sumter, Hale, Perry, Pickens and Tuscaloosa). The Black Belt Region is noted as the second highest poverty region in Alabama. The Council wants to expand in all counties with a more focused approach on financial and wellness literacy for children and families.

“We are dealing with cycles of illiteracy.”(McFallen, 2016) We must start with partnerships addressing the factors of illiteracy (transportation, resources for children during the summer months, family issues, reading and learning disabilities). The Council wants to work with other agencies when they receive more grants like working with Habitat for Humanity by giving boxes of books out to the public, for example. More awareness programs and more non-profit organizations as well as more volunteers are needed to help battle illiteracy. The council works within the communities by going into each county and offering adult and family programming along with events to assist with financial and health literacy such as how to read medical prescriptions. They also utilize digital literacy through government programs for broadband internet.

The Council wants to partner with the communities and identify areas that volunteers could help in. They also want to partner with state agencies to help with materials needed such as computers. “Literacy is not just reading it also involves the how to!” (McFallen, 2016)

South Baldwin Literacy Council

The South Baldwin Literacy Council is a non-profit organization that serves a 750 square mile radius in South Alabama from Interstate I-10 South to the Gulf of Mexico, from the Fish River near Mobile Bay east to the Florida state line. The Council is funded annually, generally by the Dollar General Adult Literacy Grant, the Daniel Foundation, the Snook Foundation and the Holy Spirit Thrift Store. The council is also funded by an annual fundraiser entitled the Alphabet Jubilee where the community gathers together for an evening of dinner, dancing and socializing for the purpose of raising funds for the operating expenses and staff expenses for the council’s operations. In 2015, the council raised \$19,747.93 for the annual Jubilee (South Baldwin Literacy Council, 2015). Adult services provided by the council include adult basic education skills, GED preparation, ESL (English as a Second Language) instruction, and youth services of one-on-one tutoring in area elementary schools and, summer tutoring. The council is the creator of “A Book and a Bear” program for South Baldwin Regional Medical Center pediatric patients. The pediatric staff is able offer comfort to ill or injured children by giving each child a teddy bear and a book of their choosing. Additionally, parents receive information promoting the awareness of the importance of reading to their children starting at birth.

In 2015 the Council began working to develop a new adult program called “Learn to Earn.” The goal of this program was to make better skilled employees for the community workforce. Area businesses and human resource managers were interviewed to see if they had employees who could benefit from free one-on-one tutoring in the areas of reading, math and

workplace skills. The council felt that the help of employers and businesses would help make the program a great success and would allow them to be able to access grants not yet available to them. There is an 11% illiteracy rate in Baldwin County (Council, 2016). Resistance to ask for help is one of the problems that prevent people from obtaining the resources and assistance needed to fight illiteracy. One struggle the agency faces that has been a common thread with the Literacy Councils in Alabama is the right way to advertise. The council advised that there are not many who are aware of their organization and what they are here to do. They have brochures but in order for the brochures to be effective, they require the ability to read and comprehend in order to learn what services are available and how to access them. They have invested in television and radio advertising and speak to civic and religious organizations to get the word out about their program. They also use flyers in schools and newsletters in the libraries in their community.

The Council has three part-time employees (a Director, an Adult Literacy Coordinator, and an ESL Coordinator), and volunteers that dedicate their available time to the program. They do not currently have a hotline but agree that one would be beneficial. The council receives referrals from the Dollar General Adult Literacy Grant that in turn refers customers to the National Literacy Directory. This method has not proven to be very effective due to the amount of time needed to maintain this process. The council does assist in offering free transportation to classes for their Adult Basic Education GED learners and they partner with Faulkner State Community College's GED program and they have access to online GED preparation. They are interested in the possibility of coordinating services with other literacy councils statewide. They believe networking and communication throughout the state would be beneficial to the agencies that serve this population.

The adult programs are measured mostly through tutor observation by use of the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE) which can be used to determine a person's skills and aptitudes in Reading, Math, and English as they would be applied in the workforce (Study Guide Zone, 2016). They also use the Reading Horizons which paces student's reading instruction and has an assessment built into it. They make learner plans and reevaluate them periodically. The Council reiterated the common theme that promoting that their services are offered free of charge is their biggest need. Additionally, they need to help with raising financial resources to keep the programs operating.

Goodwill was founded in 1902 by Rev. Edgar J. Helms, a Methodist minister who collected used household goods and clothing and trained financially struggling individuals to repair the used goods to be resold or given to the individuals that needed them. Easter Seals was created in 1934 after Rev. Helms lost his son in a streetcar accident. Rev. Helms realized that there was a lack of sufficient medical resources available to save his son and began fund-raising to build a hospital in his hometown. Rev. Helms learned that children with disabilities were being hidden from public view and gave him purpose to found the National Society for Crippled Children which in turn launched its first Easter Seals campaign to raise money for its services. Easter Seals believes in the concept of providing those with disability needs the right to live a normal life. (The History of GES, 2016)

Goodwill Easter Seals

Goodwill Easter Seals of the Gulf Coast was created in 1999 when two separate entities, Goodwill and Easter Seals joined together to strengthen their ability to do positive works in the community. Goodwill Easter Seals of the Gulf Coast is a member of the Pro Literacy-National Organization, the Laubach Literacy International Program and the Literacy Volunteers of

America. The combination of these organizations creates more educational opportunities for adult learners through an expanded national network and new international initiatives. Goodwill Easter Seals of the Gulf Coast serves Mobile, Baldwin, Washington, Clarke and Escambia (Alabama and Florida) counties as far into Northwest Florida as Fort Walton. A generous 90% of profit from Goodwill retail stores goes toward funding community programs, including literacy programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout our country, states are actively working to reduce illiteracy rates. Illiteracy can be broken down into many different stages, types and levels. Illiteracy can even be defined in many different ways. In general, programs geared towards fighting illiteracy address the problem with programs that target a specific age group or a specific type of illiteracy. Depending on the target audience, literacy efforts are then broken down and customized to meet the needs based on the deficiency.

Literacy efforts often begin by offering programs that provide resources for parents, custodians, and child care providers to utilize before the formal education process begins. Research indicates that literacy efforts that occur before formal education begins have a direct relationship to a person's literacy potential. (Clark, 2007) Once the formal educational process begins, states commonly have "K-12" literacy action plans that are utilized. Adult education often falls under the charge of a state's community college system or post-secondary education, as is the case in Alabama. Adult Secondary Education usually serves adults who read above the eighth grade level and prepares them for GED obtainment and employment. Functionally illiterate adults are at a lower level of education. (U.S. Programs Division of ProLiteracy Worldwide, 2003)

This project is focused on adult illiteracy. Although the illiteracy rates fluctuate in states throughout the country, the efforts each state is making to fight the problem are all similar. The main differences throughout the states are the level of government involvement, the level of community involvement combined with the level of government funding provided for the fight against adult illiteracy.

The level of government involvement in the fight against illiteracy varies across the country. Many states have illiteracy efforts that are funded, coordinated, supported and monitored by the state from the executive level down to the municipalities. States that have this type of government involvement have a greater potential to provide support and services to the areas with the greatest need. This is made possible because the relationships, partnerships and collaborative nature of the government's involvement all the way down to the municipal or community level. The challenge is finding the right balance of government oversight, support and funding and the private organizations.

States across the nation also are reliant on governmental or private organizations and individuals to deal with adult illiteracy. It is a common theme in the United States to see numerous literacy councils and coalitions formed and operating within states. These types of organizations rely heavily on grant funding and volunteer support to provide resources to illiterate adults. One of the main problems in dealing with illiterate adults is the number of volunteers needed. It generally takes one volunteer to work with one person placing a heavy demand on the need for volunteers. This is a tremendous and shared struggle throughout the nation. This team met with numerous literacy councils in the State of Alabama and they all have the same needs in the areas of funding and volunteers. Most funding comes from private grants and charitable giving. If we have a county that has 5,000 illiterate adults and we are relying on

private organizations to deal with this problem in a reasonable timeframe, that organization will need a sizable amount of volunteers, funding and resources.

In Alabama, private organizations are mostly working to cover specific regions of the state. Our team found that very few are set up to work a specific local area. One key element of successfully dealing with adult illiteracy will be to bolster the amount of private organizations functioning so they can focus on smaller areas of need. It would be ideal if each individual county had its own operation supported by larger, regional operations and that are supported by the state. One of the main concerns in some counties in Alabama is the lack of resources. Even if some counties had their own private organization working on illiteracy, there are very few resources available. Many face the challenge of having no place to meet to conduct literacy classes and the adults who need the help also suffer from their own barriers such as childcare and transportation.

The magnitude of this problem requires the coordination of private, municipal, county and state resources to ensure that Alabama is doing the most it can with what is available. Much of the coordination can be accomplished without additional funding or the creation of new positions. Identifying the right people who are already in the right place and are willing to join forces to create a long term awareness program that combines coordination of resources available at all levels will maximize the ability to eradicate illiteracy in Alabama. Alabama's future in the fight for literacy must be tailored to each county's needs.

ALABAMA TASK FORCE ON ADULT LITERACY

Many states across the nation have established taskforces headed by governors and made up of senators, representatives, educational experts, consultants and advocacy groups. Such groups oversee the big picture, advocate for funding, develop policy, identify resources and needs, provide leadership, and put all the pieces of the puzzle together.

Alabama needs to conduct its own research to better understand the problem of illiteracy in Alabama. Blanket policies have not had much success in the arena of adult illiteracy. The funding, needs, and resources needed to improve illiteracy rates will vary greatly based on the area where illiteracy is occurring. The needs of one county might be completely opposite of the needs of neighboring counties. Successful strategies will need to gain the commitment of all state's political, educational, business, and civic leaders. Strategies must include leaders in communities and counties, according to the research conducted in Kentucky. (Legislative Research Commission, 2000)

The current efforts in Alabama to address illiteracy are compartmentalized to a great extent. Some experts have used the analogy of "silos" to represent how agencies, departments, organizations, schools, religious organizations, councils, coalitions and volunteers work towards reducing the number of illiterate Alabamians, but only a small amount of work is a collaborative effort. A task force as proposed herein could provide an avenue for networking among city, county, and regional councils. The future efforts of Alabama in the battle with illiteracy will need to be long term. We did not arrive at this situation overnight and a strategic investment in our future is required for long-range success.

LITERACY AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

Awareness is a critical component of this team's recommendations. How do we make everyone aware of the serious nature of illiteracy in Alabama? If we were able to do this, would information alone motivate more individuals, employers, families, organizations, students, to become involved in the efforts to eradicate illiteracy from Alabama? It is possible, it is realistic and it is obtainable.

Many organizations and states have already recognized the need and benefit of awareness strategies to deal with problems that affect the state as a whole. Awareness is widely understood by most, but is a very broad and vague term. It can be a process which can open opportunities for the exchange of information and the development of competencies or skills necessary to change a social attitude or behavior. (Sayers, 2006) A good awareness program includes a few key elements. (Piekarz, Cowan, & Finkeldey, 2010).

The first key element is a broad support system. Alabama leaders must recruit interested scholars, legislators, religious institutions, nonprofit organizations, corporations, media, professionals, students and the general public to gain community support. The second key element is the engagement of diverse activities. Multiple forms of media should be utilized to relay the intended message to the public. The third key element of an awareness campaign is an accurate and concise message. The message needs to be brief and powerful.

INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

Our team realized early on in the project that there is a tremendous need for volunteers in the battle against illiteracy. Every single subject matter expert we interacted with made this point very clear. In the formal education system it is normal to have a classroom where students meet together and learn from a teacher. The best method for teaching illiterate adults is to work with them one on one. The timeframe for learning to occur is much different in formal education settings and adult illiteracy learning. Illiterate adults take much longer to make increases in learning than children learning the same information. Because of the needs of adult learners Alabama has a tremendous need for volunteers.

How can Alabama increase the number of volunteers working in the field of adult illiteracy? The awareness campaign mentioned here could be very beneficial in getting the word out about the need for volunteers. In addition to this, Alabama should look at incentives that would attract volunteers to work with adults.

Currently there are approximately 30,000 state employees working across the State of Alabama. An incentive program that would motivate a portion of these employees to volunteer in their community during their work day would be beneficial. This would require coordination with the Alabama State Personnel Department to develop appropriate protocol. Other potential incentives could be developed for college students. In the past some colleges have required student organizations to perform some type of community service project. Some of those projects have included visiting the elderly at nursing homes or serving as mentors for local school students. This could provide an opportunity to increase the number of volunteers in a community. Incentives for the student could vary from a few hours away from classes to college credit depending upon a student's major course of study.

CONCLUSION

The State of Alabama has the opportunity to elevate the lives of thousands of our citizens by cultivating literacy. We, the members of Team Literacy-A Step Up, have been given the opportunity to further the awareness of this issue to public and private organizations, to emphasize the importance of reaching out to our communities and counties most effected by adult illiteracy and, introduce the need to continue organizing volunteer recruitment and training activities. It has been our honor to have been given the opportunity to share our research findings and respectfully offer recommendations to leaders throughout Alabama. Esteemed group we thank you for your time and service to the citizens of Alabama and all the subject matter experts and stakeholders who shared the knowledge and time with us along the way. It is now up to all of us to work together to make a difference, to take “A STEP UP.

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